Letters Of Saint Thérèse To

Her Sister Celine

I

J.M.J.T

May 8, 1888.

DEAREST CÉLINE, - There are moments when I wonder whether I am really and truly in the Carmel; sometimes I can scarcely believe it. What have I done for God that He should shower so many graces upon me?

A whole month has passed since we parted; but why do I say parted? Even were the wide ocean between us, our souls would remain as one. And yet I know that not to have me is real suffering, and if I listened to myself I should ask Jesus to let me bear the sadness in your stead! I do not listen, as you see; I should be afraid of being selfish in wishing for myself the better part – I mean the suffering. You are right – life is often burdensome and bitter. It is painful to begin a day of toil, especially when Jesus hides Himself from our love. What is this sweet Friend about? Does He not see our anguish and the burden that weighs us down? Why does He not come and comfort us?

Be not afraid…. He is here at hand. He is watching, and it is He who begs from us this pain, these tears…. He needs them for souls, for our souls, and He longs to give us a magnificent reward. I assure you that it costs Him dear to fill us with bitterness, but He knows that it is the only means of preparing us to know Him as He knows Himself, and to become ourselves Divine! Our soul is indeed great and our destiny glorious. Let us lift ourselves above all things that pass, and hold ourselves far from the earth! Up above, the air is so pure … Jesus may hide Himself, but we know that He is there.

II

October 20, 1888.

MY DEAREST SISTER, - Do not let your weakness make you unhappy. When, in the morning, we feel no courage or strength for the practice of virtue, it is really a grace: it is the time to "*lay the axe to the root of the tree,*"[1] relying upon Jesus alone. If we fall, an act of love will set all right, and Jesus smiles. He helps us without seeming to do so; and the tears which sinners cause Him to shed are wiped away by our poor weak love. Love can do all things. The most impossible tasks seem to it easy and sweet. You know well that Our Lord does not look so much at the greatness of our actions, nor even at their difficulty, as at the love with which we do them. What, then, have we to fear?

You wish to become a Saint, and you ask me if this is not attempting too much. Céline, I will not tell you to aim at the seraphic holiness of the most privileged souls, but rather to be "*perfect as your Heavenly Father is perfect*."[2] You see that your dream – that our dreams and

[1] Matt. iii.10.
[2] Apoe. xxi. 4.

our desires – are not fancies, since Jesus Himself has laid their realisation upon us as a commandment.

III

January, 1889.

MY DEAR LITTLE CÉLINE, - Jesus offers you the cross, a very heavy cross, and you are afraid of not being able to carry it without giving way. Why? Our Beloved Himself fell three times on the way to Calvary, and why should we not imitate our Spouse? What a favour from Jesus, and how He must love us to send us so great a sorrow! Eternity itself will not be long enough to bless Him for it. He heaps his favours upon us upon the greatest Saints. What, then, are His loving designs for our souls? That is a secret which will only be revealed to us in our Heavenly Home, on the day when "*the Lord shall wipe away all our tears*."[3]

Now we have nothing more to hope for on earth – "the cool evenings are passed"[4] – for us suffering alone remains! Ours is an enviable lot, and the Seraphim in Heaven are jealous of our happiness.

The other day I came across this striking passage: "To be resigned and to be united to the Will of God are not the same; there is the same difference between them as that which exists between union and unity; in union there are still two, in unity there is but one."[5] Yes, let us be one with God even in this life; and for this we should be more than resigned, we should embrace the Cross with joy.

IV

February 28, 1889.

MY DEAR LITTLE SISTER, - Jesus is "*a Spouse of blood*."[6] He wishes for Himself all the blood of our hearts. You are right – it costs us dear to give Him what He asks. But what a joy that it does cost! It is happiness to bear our crosses, and to feel our weakness in doing so.

Céline, far from complaining to Our Lord of this cross which He sends us, I cannot fathom the Infinite Love which has led Him to treat us in this way. Our dear Father must indeed be loved by God to have so much suffering given to him. It is a delight for us to be humbled with him. I know that by humiliation alone can Saints be made, and I also know that our trial is a mine of gold for us to turn to account. I, who am but a little grain of sand, wish to set to work, though I have neither courage nor strength. Now this very want of power will make my task easier, for I wish to work for love. Our martyrdom is beginning … Let us go forth to suffer together, dear sister, and let us offer our sufferings to Jesus for the salvation of souls.

V

March 12, 1889.

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[3] Matt. v. 48.
[4] St. John of the Cross.
[5] Mme. Swetchine.
[6] Exodus iv. 25.

… I must forget this world. Here everything wearies me – I find only one joy, that of suffering, and this joy, which is not one of sense, is above all joy. Life is passing, and eternity is drawing near. Soon we shall live the very life of God. After we have been filled at the source of all bitterness, our thirst will be quenched at the very Fountain of all sweetness.

"*The figure of this world passeth away*"[7] – soon we shall see new skies – a more radiant sun will light with its splendour crystal seas and infinite horizons. We shall no longer be prisoners in a land of exile, all will have passed away, and with our Heavenly Spouse we shall sail upon boundless seas. Now, "*our harps are hanging on the willows which grow by the rivers of Babylon*,"[8] but in the day of our deliverance what harmonies will they not give forth, how joyfully shall we make all their strings vibrate! Now, "*we shed tears as we remember Sion, for how can we sing the songs of the Lord in a land of exile?*"[9] The burden of our song is suffering. Jesus offers us a chalice of great bitterness. Let us not withdraw our lips from it, but suffer in peace. He says *peace* does say *joy*, or at least sensible joy: to suffer in peace it is enough to will heartily all that Our Lord wills. Do not think we can find love without suffering, for our nature remains and must be taken into account; but it puts great treasures within our reach. Suffering is indeed our very livelihood, and is so precious that Jesus came down upon earth on purpose to possess it. We should like to suffer generously and nobly; we should like never to fall. What an illusion! What does it matter to me if I fall at every moment! In that way I realise my weakness, and I gain thereby. My God, Thou seest how little I am good for, when Thou dost carry me in Thy Arms; and if Thou leavest me alone, well, it is because it pleases Thee to see me lie on the ground. Then why should I be troubled?

If you are willing to bear in peace the trial of not being pleased with yourself, you will be offering the Divine Master a home in your heart. It is true that you will suffer, because you will be like a stranger to your own house; but do not be afraid – the poorer you are, the more Jesus will love you. I know that He is better pleased to see you stumbling in the night upon a stony road, than walking in full light of day upon a path carpeted with flowers, because these flowers might hinder your advance.

VI

July 14, 1889.

MY DARLING SISTER, - I am ever with you in spirit. Yes, it is very hard to live upon this earth, but to-morrow, in a brief hour, we shall be at rest. O my God, what shall we then see? What is this life which will have no end? Our Lord will be the soul of our soul. O unsearchable mystery! " *ye hath not seen nor ear heard, neither hath it entered into the heart of man what things God hath prepared for them that love Him.*"[10] And all this will come soon – very soon – if we love Jesus ardently. It seems to me that God has no need of years to perfect His labour of love in a soul. One ray from His Heart can in an instant make His flower blossom forth, never to fade … Céline, during the fleeting moments that remain to us, let us save souls! I feel that Our Spouse asks us for souls - above all, for the souls of Priests … It is He Who bids me tell you this.

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[7] I Cor. vii. 32.
[8] Cf. Ps.cxxxvi. a.
[9] Cf. Ps.cxxxvi. 4.
[10] I Cor. ii. 9.

There is but one thing to be done here below: to love Jesus, and to save souls for Him that He may be more loved. We must not let slip the smallest opportunity of giving Him joy. We must refuse Him nothing. He is in such need of love.

We are His chosen lilies. He dwells as a King in our midst – He lets us share the honours of His Royalty – His Divine Blood bedews our petals – and His Thorns as they wounds us spread abroad the perfume of our love.

VII

October 22, 1889.

MY DEAREST CÉLINE, - I send you a picture of the Holy Face. The contemplation of this Divine subject seems to me to belong in a special way to my little sister, truly the sister of my soul. May she be another Veronica, and wipe away all the Blood and Tears of Jesus, her only Love! May she give Him souls! May she force her way through the soldiers – that is, the world – to come close to His side … Happy will she be when she sees in Heaven the value of that mysterious draught with which she quenched the thirst of her Heavenly Spouse; when she see His Lips, once parched with burning thirst, speaking to her the one eternal word – love, and the thanks which shall have not end….

Good-bye, dear little Veronica;[11] to-morrow, no doubt, your Beloved will ask some new sacrifice, a fresh relief for His thirst … but "*let us go and die with Him!*"

VIII

July 18, 1890.

MY DEAR LITTLE SISTER, - I send you a passage from Isaias which will comfort you. Long ago the Prophet's soul was filled with the thought of the hidden beauties of the Divine Face, as our souls are now. Many a century has passed since then. It makes me wonder what is Time. Time is but a mirage, a dream. Already God sees us in glory, and rejoiced in our everlasting bliss. How much good I derive from this thought! I understand now why He allows us to suffer.

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[11] It is remarkable that Soeur Thérèse applied this name to her sister Céline, who, under her inspiration, was later to reproduce so faithfully the true likeness of Our Lord, from the Holy Winding Sheet of Turin.

It is also a coincidence that soon after the death of Soeur Thérèse the mystery of this precious relic was explained. Till it was solemnly exposed in 1898, no one had seen the Holy Winding Sheet for thirty years. Photography revealed the fact that the mysterious imprint of the Body of Jesus, which had hitherto puzzled even experts, is in reality a "negative." The "positive" obtained from it shows the majestic figure of Christ, but the outlines are somewhat blurred and indistinct. To produce a picture which would appeal to the devotion of the faithful, it was necessary to retrace the figure with the greatest care and precision. Céline devoted six months to the task, and succeeded in making an admirable and touching copy of the photograph.

Our Holy Father, Pope Pius X., has attached numerous indulgences to this representation of the Holy Face, and has expressed his desire that "it should find a place in every Catholic household." At the same time he granted an indulgence of 300 days, *toties quoties*, for the recitation of a prayer to the Holy Face composed by Soeur Thérèse.

The prayer is given on page 423. If the authenticity of the Holy Winding Sheet of Turin be accepted, then this picture of the Holy Face is without doubt the most exact likeness of Our Lord which exists. With regard to the authenticity and to the explanation of the figure on the shroud being a negative, the reader is referred to two able articles which appeared in the *Tablet* of April 1 and April 8, 1911, pp. 482 and 522.

Copies of the picture can be obtained at the Carmel of Lisieux or the Orphan's Press, Rochdale, England. [ED.]

Since Our Beloved has "*trodden the wine-press alone*,"[12] the wine-press from which He gives us to drink – on our side let us not refuse to be clothed in blood-stained garments, or to tread out for Jesus a new wine which may quench His thirst! When "*He looks around Him*," He will not be able to say now that "*He is alone*"[13] – we shall be there to help Him.

"*His look as it were hidden*."[14] Alas! it is so even to this day, and no one understands His Tears. "*Open to Me, My Sister, My Spouse*," he says to us, "*for My Head is full of dew and My Locks of the drops of the night*."[15] Thus Jesus complains to our souls when He is deserted and forgotten … *To be forgotten*. It is this, I think, which gives Him most pain.

And our dear Father! – it is heartrending, but how can we repine since Our Lord Himself was looked upon "*as one struck by God and afflicted*"?[16] In this great sorrow we should forget ourselves, and pray for Priests – our lives must be entirely devoted to them. Our Divine Master makes me feel more and more that this is what He asks of you and me.

IX

September 23, 1890.

O Céline, how can I tell you all that is happening within me? What a wound I have received! And yet I feel it is inflicted by a loving Hand, by a Hand divinely jealous.

All was ready for my espousals;[17] but do you not think that something was still wanting to the feast? It is true, Jesus had already enriched me with many jewels, but no doubt there was one of incomparable beauty still missing; this priceless diamond He has given me to-day … Papa will not be here to-morrow! Céline, I confess that I have cried bitterly, … I am still crying so that I can scarcely hold my pen.

You know how intensely I longed t see our dearest Father again; but now I feel that it is God's Will that He should not be at my feast. God has allowed it simply to try our love. Jesus wishes me to be an orphan … to be alone, with Him alone, so that He may unite Himself more closely to me. He wishes, too, to give me back in Heaven this joy so lawfully desired, but which He has denied me here on earth.

To-day's trial is one of those sorrows that are difficult to understand: a joy was set before us, one most natural and easy of attainment. We stretched forth our hands … and the coveted joy was withdrawn. But it is not the hand of man which has done this thing – it is God's work. Céline, understand your Thérèse, and let us accept cheerfully the thorn which is offered us. To-morrow's feast will one of tears, but I feel that Jesus will be greatly consoled….

X

October 14, 1890.

MY DARLING SISTER, - I know quite well all you are suffering. I know your anguish, and I share it. Oh! if I could but impart to you the peace which Jesus has put into my soul amid my most bitter tears. Be comforted – all passes away. Our life of yesterday is spent; death too will

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[12] Isa. lxiii. 3.
[13] Cf. Isa. lxiii. 5.
[14] Isa. liii. 3.
[15] Cant. v. 2.
[16] Is. liii.4.
[17] Soeur Thérèse received the veil on September 24, 1890.

come and go, and then we shall rejoice in life, true life, for countless ages, for evermore. Meanwhile let us make of our heart a garden of delights where Our sweet Saviour may come and take His rest. Let us plant only lilies there, and sing with St. John of the Cross:

" There I remained in deep oblivion,
My head reposing upon Him I love,
Lost to myself and all!
I cast my cares away
And let them, heedless, mid the lilies lie."[18]

XI

April 26, 1891.

MY DEAR LITTLE SISTER, - Three years ago our hearts had not yet been bruised, and life was one glad smile. Then Jesus looked down upon us, and all things were changed into an ocean of tears … but likewise into an ocean of grace and of love. God has taken from us him whom we loved so tenderly – was it not that we might be able to say more truly than ever: "*Our Father Who art in Heaven*"? How consoling is this divine word, and what vast horizons it opens before us!

My darling Céline, you asked me so many questions when we were little, I wonder how it was you never asked: "Why has God not made me an Angel?" Well, I am going to tell you. Our Lord wishes to have His Court here on earth, as He has in Heaven; He wishes for angel-martyrs and angel-apostles; and if He has not made you an Angel in Heaven, it is because He wishes you to be an Angel of earth, so that you may be able to suffer for His Love.

Dearest sister, the shadows will soon disappear, the rays of the Eternal Sun will thaw the hoar frost of winter…. A little longer, and we shall be in our true country, and our childhood's joys – those Sunday evenings, those outpourings of the heart – will be given back to us for ever!

XII

August 15, 1892.

MY DEAR LITTLE SISTER, - To write to you to-day I am obliged to steal a little time from Our Lord. He will forgive, because it is of Him that we are going to speak together. The vast solitudes and enchanting views which unfold themselves before you ought to uplift your soul. I do not see those things, and I content myself by saying with St. John of the Cross in his Spiritual Canticle:

In Christ I have the mountains,
The quiet, wooded valleys.

Lately I have been thinking what I could undertake for the salvation of souls, and these simple words of the Gospel have given me light. Pointing to the fields of ripe corn, Jesus once said to His disciples: "*Lift up your eyes and see the fields, for they are already white with the*

[18] St. John of the Cross: The Night of the Soul, 8th stanza.

harvest";[19] and again: "*The harvest indeed is great, but the labourers are few; pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest that He send forth labourers*."[20]

Here is a mystery indeed! Is not Jesus all-powerful? Do not creatures belong to Him who made them? Why does He deign to say: "*Pray ye the Lord of the harvest that He send forth labourers*"? It is because His Love for us is so unsearchable, so tender, that He wishes us to share in all He does. The Creator of the Universe awaits the prayer of a poor little soul to save a multitude of other soul, ransomed, like her, at the price of His Blood.

Our vocation is not to go forth and reap in Our Father's fields. Jesus does not say to us: "*Look down and reap the harvest*." Our mission is even more sublime. "*Lift up your eyes and see*," saith our Divine Master, "see how in Heaven there are empty thrones. It is for you to fill them…. You are as Moses praying on the mountain, so ask Me for labourers and they shall be sent. I only await a prayer, a sigh! Is not the apostolate of prayer – so to speak – higher than that of the spoken word? It is for us by prayer to train workers who will spread the glad tidings of the Gospel and who will save countless souls – the souls to whom we shall be the spiritual Mothers. What, then, have we to envy in the Priests of the Lord?

XIII

MY DARLING SISTER, - The affection of our childhood days has changed into a closest union of mind and heart. Jesus has drawn us to Him together, for are you not already His? He has put the world beneath our feet. Like Zaccheus we have climbed into a tree to behold Him – mysterious tree, raising us high above all things, from whence we can say: "All is mine, all is for me: the Earth and the Heavens are mine, God Himself is mine, and the Mother of my God is for me."[21]

Speaking of that Blessed Mother, I must tell you of one of my simple ways. Sometimes I find myself saying to her: "Dearest Mother, it seems to me that I am happier than you. I have you for my Mother, and you have no Blessed Virgin to love…. It is true, you are the Mother of Jesus, but you have given Him to me; and He, from the Cross, has given you to be our Mother – thus we are richer than you! Long ago, in your humility, you wished to become the little handmaid of the Mother of God; and I – poor little creature – am not you handmaid but your child! You are the Mother of Jesus, and you are also *mine*!"

Our greatness in Jesus is verily marvellous, my Céline. He has unveiled for us many a mystery by making us climb the mystical tree of which I spoke above. And now what science is He going to teach? Have we not learned all things from Him?

"*Make haste to come down, for this day I must abide in thy house*."[22] Jesus bids us come down. Where, then, must we go? The Jews asked Him: "*Master, where dwellest Thou*?"[23] And He answered, "*The foxes have holes and the birds of the air nests, but the Son of Man hath not where to lay His Head.*"[24] If we are to be the dwelling-place of Jesus, we must come down even to this – we must be so poor that we have not where to lay our heads.

This grace of light has been given to me during my retreat. Our Lord desires that we should receive Him into our hearts, and no doubt they are empty of creatures. Alas! mine is not empty of self; that is why He bids me come down. And I shall come down even to the very

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[19] John iv. 35.
[20] Matt. ix. 37. 38.
[21] St. John of the Cross.
[22] Luke xix. 5.
[23] John i. 38.
[24] Luke ix. 58

ground, that Jesus may find within my heart a resting-place for His Divine Head, and may feel that there at least He is loved and understood.

XIV

April 25, 1893.

MY LITTLE CÉLINE, - I must come and disclose the desires of Jesus with regard to your soul. Remember that He did not say: "I am the Flower of the gardens, a carefully tended Rose"; but, "*I am the Flower of the fields and the Lily of the valleys*."[25] Well, you must be always as a drop of dew hidden in the heart of this beautiful Lily of the valley.

The dew-drop – what could be simpler, what more pure? It is not the child of the clouds; it is born beneath the starry sky, and survives but a night. When the sun darts forth its ardent rays, the delicate pearls adorning each blade of grass quickly pass into the lightest of vapour…. There is the portrait of my little Céline! She is a drop of dew, an offspring of Heaven – her true Home. Through the night of this life she must hide herself in the *Field-flower's* golden cup; no eye must discover her abode.

Happy dewdrop, known to God alone, think not of the rushing torrents of this world! Envy not even the crystal stream which winds among the meadows. The ripple of its waters is sweet indeed, but it can be heard by creatures. Besides, the Field-flower could never contain it in its cup. One must be so little to draw near to Jesus, and few are the souls that aspire to be little and unknown. "Are not the river and the brook," they urge, "of more use than a dew-drop? Of what avail is it? Its only purpose is to refresh for one moment some poor little field-flower."

Ah! they little know the true *Flower of the field*. Did they know Him they would understand better Our Lord's reproach to Martha. Our Beloved needs neither our brilliant deeds nor our beautiful thoughts. Were He in search of lofty ideas, has He not His Angels, whose knowledge infinitely surpasses that of the greatest genius of earth? Neither intellect nor other talents has He come to seek among us … He has become the *Flower of the field* to show how much He loves simplicity.

The Lily of the valley asks but a single dewdrop, which for one night shall rest in its cup, hidden from all human eyes. But when the shadows shall begin to fade, when the *Flower of the field* shall have become the *Sun of Justice*,[26] then the dewdrop – the humble sharer of His exile – will rise up to Him as love's vapour. He will shed on her a ray of His light, and before the whole court of Heaven she will shine eternally like a precious pearl, a dazzling mirror of the Divine Sun.

XV

August 2, 1893.

MY DEAR CÉLINE, - What you write fills me with joy; you are making your way by a royal road. The Spouse in the Canticles, unable to find her Beloved in the time of repose, went forth to seek Him in the city. But in vain … it was only without the walls she found Him. It is not in the sweetness of repose that Jesus would have us discover His Adorable Presence. He hides Himself in darkness. True, this was not His way with the multitude, for as we read that all the people were carried away as soon as He spoke to them.

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[25] Cant. ii. x.
[26] Malachias iv. 2.

The weaker souls He charmed by His divine eloquence with the aim of strengthening them against the day of temptation and trial, but His faithful friends were few that day when "*He was silent*"[27] in the presence of His judges. Sweet melody to my heart is that silence of the Divine Master!

He would have us give Him alms as to a poor man, and puts Himself – so to speak – at our mercy. He will take nothing that is not cheerfully given, and the veriest trifle is precious in His Divine Eyes. He stretches forth His Hand to receive a little love, that in the radiant day of the Judgment He may speak to us those ineffably sweet words: "*Come, ye blessed of My Father, for I was hungry and you gave Me to drink, I was a stranger and you took Me in, I was sick and you visited Me, I was in prison and you came to Me*."[28]

Dearest Céline, let us rejoice in the lot that is ours! Let us give and give again, and give royally, never forgetting that Our Beloved is a hidden Treasure which few souls know how to find. Now to discover that which is hidden we must needs hide ourselves in the hiding-place. Let our life, then, be one of concealment. The author of the *Imitation* tells us:

"If thou would'st know and learn something to the purpose, love to be unknown, and to be esteemed as nothing …[29] Having forsaken all things, a man should forsake himself… Let this man glory in this and another in that, but thou for thy part rejoice neither in this nor in that, but in the contempt of thyself."[30]

XVI

MY DEAR CÉLINE, - You tell met that my letters do good to you. I am indeed glad, but I assure you that I am under no misapprehension: "*Unless the Lord build the house, they labour in vain who build it*."[31] The greatest eloquence cannot call forth a single act of love without that grace which touches the heart.

Think of a beautiful peach with its delicate tint of rose, with its flavour so sweet that no human skill could invent such nectar. Tell me, Céline, is it for the peach's own sake that God created that colour so fair to the eye, that velvety covering so soft to the touch? Is it for itself that He made it so sweet? Nay, it is for us; the only thing that is all its own and is essential to its being, is the stone: it possess nothing beyond.

Thus also it pleases Jesus to lavish His gifts on certain souls in order to draw yet others to Himself; in His Mercy He humbles them inwardly and gently compels them to recognize their nothingness and His Almighty Power. Now this sentiment of humility is like a kernel of grace which God hastens to develop against that blessed day, when, clothed with an imperishable beauty, they will be placed, without danger, on the banqueting-table of Paradise. Dear little sister, sweet echo of my soul, Thérèse is far from the heights of fervour at this moment; but when I am in this state of spiritual dryness, unable to pray, or to practise virtue, I look for little opportunities, for the smallest trifles, to please my Jesus: a smile or a kind word, for instance, when I would wish to be silent, or to show that I am bored. If no such occasion offer, I try at least to say over and over again that I love Him. This is not hard, and it keeps alive the fire in my heart. Even should the fire of love seem dead, I would still throw my tiny straws on the ashes, and I am confident it would light up again.

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[27] Matt. xxvi. 23.
[28] Matt. xxv. 34-36.
[29] Imit. Bk. I, ch. ii. 3.
[30] Ib., Bk. III, ch. xiix. 7.
[31] Ps. cxxvi. I.

It is true I am not always faithful, but I never lose courage. I leave myself in the Arms of Our Lord. He teaches me to draw profit from everything, from the good and from the bad which He finds in me.[32] He teaches me to speculate in the Bank of Love, or rather it is He Who speculates for me, without telling me how He does it – that is His affair, not mine. I have but to surrender myself wholly to Him, to do so without reserve, without even the satisfaction of knowing what it is all bringing to me…. After all, I am not the prodigal child, and Jesus need not trouble about a feast for me, *because I am always with Him*.[33]

I have read in the Gospel that the Good Shepherd leaves the faithful ones of His flock in the desert to hasten after the lost sheep. This confidence touches me deeply. You see He is sure of them. How could they stray away? They are the prisoners of Love. In like manner does the Beloved Shepherd of our souls deprive us of the sweets of His Presence, to give His consolations to sinners; or if He lead us to Mount Thabor it is but for one brief moment … the pasture land is nearly always in the valleys, "*it is there that He takes His rest at mid-day*."[34]

XVII

October 20, 1893.

MY DEAR SISTER, - I find in the Canticle of Canticles this passage which may be fitly applied to you: "*What dost thou see in they beloved but a band of musicians in an armed camp*?"[35] Through suffering, your life has in truth become a battle-field, and there must be a band of musicians, so you shall be the little harp of Jesus. But no concert is complete without singing, and if Jesus plays, must not Céline make melody with her voice? When the music is plaintive, she will sing the songs of exile; when the music is gay, she will lilt the airs of her Heavenly Home….

Whatever may happen, all earthly events, be they happy or sad, will be but distant sounds, unable to awake a vibration from the harp of Jesus. He reserves to Himself alone the right of lightly touching its strings.

I cannot think without delight of that sweet saint, Cecilia. What an example she gives us! In the midst of a pagan world, in the very heart of danger, at the moment when she was to be united to a man whose love was so utterly of earth, it seems to me as if she should have wept and trembled with fear. But instead, "during the music of the marriage-feast Cecilia kept singing in her heart.[36] What perfect resignation! No doubt she heard other melodies than those of this world; her Divine Spouse too was singing, and the Angels repeated in chorus the refrain of Bethlehem's blessed night; "*Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men of goodwill*."[37]

The Glory of God! St. Cecilia understood it well, and longed for it with all her heart. She guessed that her Jesus was thirsting for souls … and that is why her whole desire was to bring to Him quickly the soul of the young Roman, whose only thought was of human glory. This wise Virgin will make of him a Martyr, and multitudes will follow in his footsteps. She knows no fear: the Angels in their song made promise of peace. She knows that the Prince of

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[32] St. John of the Cross
[33] Cf. Luke xv. 31.
[34] Cant. i. 6.
[35] Cf. Cant. vii. 1.
[36] Office of St. Cecilia
[37] Luke ii.14.

Peace is bound to protect her, to guard her virginity, and to make her recompense…. "*Oh, how beautiful is the chaste generation!*"[38]

Dearest sister, I hardly know what I write; I let my pen follow the dictates of my heart. You tell me that you feel your weakness, but that is a grace. It is Our Lord Who sows the seeds of distrust of self in your soul. Do not be afraid! If you do not fail to give Him pleasure in small things, He will be obliged to help you I great ones.

The Apostles laboured long without Him, they toiled a whole night and caught no fish. Their labours were not inacceptable to Him, but He wished to prove that He is the Giver of all things. So an act of humility was asked of the Apostles, and Our loving Lord called to them: "*Children, have you anything to eat*?"[39] St. Peter, avowing his helplessness, cried out: "*Lord, we have laboured all the night, and have taken nothing*.[40] It is enough, the Heart of Jesus is touched…. Had the Apostle caught some small fish, perhaps our Divine Master would have worked a miracle; but he had caught *nothing*, and so through the power and goodness of God his nets were soon filled with great fishes. Such is Our Lord's way. He gives as God – with divine largesse – but He insists on humility of heart.

XVIII

July 7, 1894.

MY DEAR LITTLE SISTER, - I do not know if you are still in the same frame of mind as when you last wrote to me; I presume that you are, and I answer with this passage of the Canticle of Canticles, which explains so well the state of a soul in utter dryness, a soul which cannot find joy or consolation in anything: "*I went down into the garden of nut-trees to see the fruits of the valleys, and to look if the vineyard has flourished, and the pomegranates were in bud. I know longer knew where I was: my soul was troubled because of the chariots of Aminadab*."[41]

There is the true picture of our souls. Often we go down into the fertile valleys where our heart loves to find its nourishment; and the vast fields of Holy Scripture, which have so often opened to yield us richest treasures, now seem but an arid and waterless waste. We know longer even know where we stand. In place of peace and light, all is sorrow and darkness. But, like the Spouse in the Canticles, we know the cause of this trial: "*My soul was troubled because of the chariots of Aminadab*." We are not as yet in our true country, and as gold is tried in the fire so must our souls be purified by temptation. We sometimes think we are abandoned. Alas! *the chariots* – that is to say, the idle clamours which beset and disturb us – are they within the soul or without? We cannot tell, but Jesus knows; He sees all our grief, and in the night, on a sudden, His Voice is heard: "*Return, return, O Sulamites: return, return, that we may behold thee.*"[42]

O gracious call! We dared no longer even look upon ourselves, the filled us with horror, and Jesus calls us that He may look upon us at leisure. He wills to see us; He comes, and with Him come the other two Persons of the Adorable Trinity to take possession of our soul.

Our Lord had promised this, when, with unspeakable tenderness, He had said of old: "*If anyone love Me he will keep My word, and My Father will love him, and We will come to him, and will make Our abode with him*."[43] To keep the word of Jesus, then, is the one condition of

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[38] Wisdom iv. 1.
[39] John xxi. 5.
[40] Luke v. 5. Soeur Thérèse joins in one the two miraculous draughts of fishes. [ED.]
[41] Cf. Cant. vi. 10, 11.
[42] Cant. vi. 12.
[43] John xiv. 23.

our happiness, the proof of our love for Him; and this word seems to me to be His very Self, for He calls Himself the Uncreated *Word* of the Father.

In the Gospel of St. John He makes the sublime prayer: "*Sanctify them by Thy word, Thy word is truth*."[44] And in another passage Jesus teaches us that He is "*the Way and the Truth and the Life*."[45] We know, then, what is this word which must be kept; we cannot say, like Pilate: "*What is truth*?"[46] We possess the Truth, for our Beloved dwells in our hearts.

Often *this Beloved is to us a bundle of myrrh*.[47] We share the chalice of His sufferings; but how sweet it will be to us one day to hear these gentle words: "*You are they who have continued with Me in My temptations, and I dispose to you, as My Father hath disposed to Me, a kingdom*."[48]

XIX

This is perhaps the last time that I need have recourse to writing in order to talk to you, my dear little sister. God in His goodness has granted my dearest wish. Come, and we will suffer together ... Then Jesus will take one of us, and the others will remain in exile yet a little longer. Now, listen well to what I am going to say: God will never, never separate us; and if I die before you, do not think that I shall be far away – never shall we have been more closely united. You must not be grieved at my childish prophecy. I am not ill, I have an iron constitution; but the Lord can break iron as if it were clay.

Our dear Father makes his presence felt in a way which touches me deeply. After a death lasting for five long years, what joy to find him as he used to be, nay, more a father than ever! How well he is going to repay you for the care you so generously bestowed on him! You were his Angel, now he will be yours. He has only been one month in Heaven, and already, through the power of his intercession, all your plans are succeeding. It is easy for him now to arrange matters for us, and he has had less to suffer on Céline's account than he had for his poor little Queen.

For a long time you have been asking me for news about the noviciate, especially about my work, and now I am going to satisfy you. In my dealings with the novices, I am like a setter on the scent of game. The role gives me much anxiety because it is so very exacting. You shall decide for yourself if this be not the case. All day long, from morn till night, I am in pursuit of game. Mother Prioress and the Novice Mistress play the part of sportsmen – but sportsmen are too big to be creeping through the cover, whereas a little dog can push its way in anywhere … and then its scent is so keen! I keep a close watch upon my little rabbits; I do not want to do them any harm, but I tell them gently: "You must keep your fur glossy, and must not look foolishly about as does a rabbit of the warren." In fact, I try to make them such as the Hunter of Souls would have them, simple little creatures that go on browsing heedless of everything else.

I laugh now, but seriously I am quite convinced that one of these rabbits – you know which one I mean – is worth a hundred times more than the setter; it has run through many a danger, and I own that, had I been in its place, I should have long since been lost for ever in the great forest of the world.

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[44] Cf. John xvii. 17.
[45] John xiv. 6.
[46] John xviii. 38.
[47] Cf. Cant. i. 12.
[48] Luke xxii. 28, 29.

XIX

I am so glad, dearest Céline, that you do not feel any particular attraction at the thought of entering the Carmel. This is really a mark of Our Lord's favour, and shows that He looks for a gift from your hands. He knows that it is so much sweeter to give than to receive. What happiness to suffer for Him Who loves us even unto folly, and to pass for fools in the eyes of the world! We judge others by ourselves, and, as the world will not hearken to reason, it calls us unreasonable too.

We may console ourselves, we are not the first. Folly was the only crime with which Herod could reproach Our Lord … and, after all, Herod was right. Yes, indeed, it was folly to come and seek the poor hearts of mortal men to make them thrones for Him, the King of Glory, Who sitteth above the Cherubim! Was He not supremely happy in the company of His Father and the Holy Spirit of Love? Why, then, come down on earth to seek sinners and make of them His closest friends? Nay, our folly could never exceed His, and our deeds are quite within the bounds of reason. The world may leave us alone. I repeat, it is the world that is *insane*, because it heeds not what Jesus has done and suffered to save it from eternal damnation.

We are neither idlers nor spendthrifts. Our Divine Master has taken our defence upon Himself. Remember the scene in the house of Lazurus: Martha was serving, while Mary had no thought of food but only of how she could please her Beloved. And "*she broke her alabaster box, and poured out upon her Saviour's Head the precious spikenard*[49]*, and the house was filled with the odour of the ointment.*"[50]

The Apostles murmured against Magdalen. This still happens, for so do men murmur against us. Even some fervent Catholics who think our ways are exaggerated, and that – with Martha – we ought to wait upon Jesus, instead of pouring out on Him the odorous ointment of our lives. Yet what does it matter if these ointment-jars – our lives – be broken, since Our Lord is consoled; and the world in spite of itself is forced to inhale the perfumes they give forth? It has much need of these perfumes to purify the unwholesome air it breathes.

For a while only, good-bye, dearest sister. Your barque is near to port. The breezes filling its sails are the zephyrs of Love – breezes that speed more swiftly than the lightning-flash. Good-bye! in a few days we shall be together within these Carmel walls … and in the after days together in Paradise. Did not Jesus say during His Passion: *"Hereafter you shall see the Son of Man sitting on the right hand of the power of God and coming in the clouds of heaven*"?[51] … We shall be there!

THÉRÈSE

[49] Cf. Mark xiv. 3.
[50] John xii. 3.
[51] Matt. xxvi. 64.

LETTERS TO MOTHER AGNESS OF JESUS

Selections

I

(Written in 1887, shortly before Thérèse entered the Carmel)

MY DARLING LITTLE MOTHER, - You are right when you tell me that every cup must contain its drop of gall. I find that trials are a great help towards detachment from the things of earth: they make one look higher than this world. Nothing here can satisfy, and we can find rest only in holding ourselves ready to do God's will.

My frail barque has great difficulty in reaching port. I sighted it long since, and still I find myself afar off. Yet Jesus steers this little barque, and I am sure that on His appointed day it will come safely to the blessed haven of the Carmel. O Pauline! when Jesus shall have vouchsafed me this grace, I wish to give myself entirely to Him, to suffer always for Him, to live for Him alone. I do not fear His rod, for even when the smart is keenest we feel that it is His sweet Hand which strikes.

It is such joy to think that for each pain, cheerfully borne we shall love God more through eternity. Happy should I be if at the hour of my death I could offer Jesus a single soul. There would be one soul less in hell, and one more to bless God in Heaven.

II

(Written during her retreat before receiving the habit.)

January, 1889.

Dryness and drowsiness – such is the state of my soul in its intercourse with Jesus! But since my Beloved wishes to sleep I shall not prevent Him. I am only too happy that He does not treat me as a stranger, but rather in a homely way. He riddles His "little ball" with pin-pricks that hurt indeed, though when they come from the Hand of this loving Friend, the pain is all sweetness, so gentle is His touch. How different the hand of Man!

Yet I am happy, most happy to suffer! If Jesus Himself does not pierce me, He guides the hand which does. Mother! if you knew how utterly indifferent to earthly things I desire to be, and of how little concern to me are all the beauties of creation. I should be wretched were I to possess them. My heart seems so vast when I think of the goods of earth – all of them together unable to full it. But by the side of Jesus how small does it appear! He is full good to me – this God who soon will be my Spouse. He is divinely lovable for not permitting me to be the captive of any passing joy. He knows well that if He sent me but a shadow of earthly happiness I should cling to it with all the intense ardour of my heart, and He refuses even this shadow … He prefers to leave me in darkness, rather than afford me a false glimmer which would not be Himself.

I do not wish creatures to have one atom of my love. I wish to give all to Jesus, since He makes me understand that He alone is perfect happiness. All! – all shall be for Him! And even when I have nothing, as is the case to-night, I will give Him this nothing …

III

January, 1889.

. . . . . .

I have a longing for those heart-wounds, those pin-pricks which inflict so much pain. I know of no ecstasy to which I not prefer sacrifice. There I find happiness, and there alone. The slender reed has no fear of being broken, for it is planted beside the waters of Love. When, therefore, it bends before the gale, it gathers strength in the refreshing stream, and longs for yet another storm to pass and sway its head. My very weakness makes me strong. No harm can come to me since, in whatever happens, I see only the tender hand of Jesus … Besides, no suffering is too big a price to pay for the glorious palm.

IV

(Written during her retreat before profession.)

September, 1890.

MY DEAREST MOTHER, - Your little hermit must give you an account of her journey. Before starting, my Beloved asked me in what land I wished to travel, and what road I wished to take. I told him that I had only one desire, that of reaching the summit of the *Mountain of Love*.

Thereupon roads innumerable spread before my gaze, but so many of these were perfect that I felt incapable of choosing any of my own free will. Then I said to my Divine Guide: "Thou knowest where lies the goal of my desire, and for Whose sake I would climb the Mountain. Thou knowest Who possesses the love of my heart. For Him only I set out on this journey; lead me therefore by the paths of His choosing: my joy shall be full if only He is pleased."

And Our Lord took me by hand, and led me through an underground passage where it is neither hot nor cold, where the sun shines not, and where neither wind nor rain can enter – a place where I see nothing but a half-veiled light, the light that gleams from the downcast Eyes of the Face of Jesus.

My Spouse speaks not a word, and I say nothing save that I love Him more than myself; and in the depths of my heart I know this is true, for I am more His than mine. I cannot see that we are advancing towards our journey's goal since we travel by a subterranean way; and yet, without knowing how, it seems to me that we are nearing the summit of the Mountain.

I give thanks to my Jesus for making me walk in darkness, and in this darkness I enjoy profound peace. Willingly do I consent to remain through all my religious life in this gloomy passage into which He has led me. I desire only that my darkness may obtain light for sinners. I am content, nay, full of joy, to be without all consolation. I should be ashamed if my love were like that of those earthly brides who are ever looking for gifts from their bridegrooms, or seeking to catch the loving smile which fills them with delight.

Thérèse, the little Spouse of Jesus, loves Him for Himself; she only looks on the Face of her Beloved to catch a glimpse of the Tears which delight her with their secret charm. She longs to wipe away those Tears, or to gather them up like priceless diamonds with which to adorn her bridal dress. *Jesus! ... Oh! I would so love Him! Love Him as he has never yet been loved! ...*

At all cost I must win the palm of St. Agnes; if it cannot be mine through blood, I must win it by Love.

V

1891.

Love can take the place of a long life. Jesus does not consider time, for He is Eternal. He only looks at the love. My little Mother, beg Him t bestow it upon me in full measure. I do not desire that thrill of love which I can feel; if Jesus feel its thrill, then that is enough for me. It is so sweet to love Him, to make Him loved. Ask Him to take me to Him on my profession-day, if by living on I should ever offend Him, because I wish to bear unsullied to Heaven the white robe of my second Baptism.[52] Now Jesus can grant me the grace never to offend Him more, or rather never to commit any faults but those which do not offend Him or give Him pain; faults which serve but to humble me and strengthen my love. There is no one to lean on apart from Jesus. He alone faileth not, and it is exceeding joy to think that He can never change.

VI

1891.

MY DEAREST LITTLE MOTHER, - Your letter has done me such good. The sentence: "Let us refrain from saying a word which could raise us in the eyes of others," has indeed enlightened my soul. Yes, we must keep all for Jesus with jealous care. It is so good to work for Him alone. How it fills the heart with joy, and lends wings to the soul! Ask of Jesus that Thérèse – His *grain of sand* – may save Him a multitude of souls in a short space of time, so that she may the sooner behold His Adorable Face.

VII

1892.

Here is the dream of this "grain of sand" : Love Jesus alone, and naught else beside! The grain of sand is so small that if it wished to open its heart to any other but Jesus, there would no longer be room for this Beloved.

What happiness to be so entirely hidden that no one gives us a thought – to be unknown even to those with whom we live! My little Mother, I long to be unknown to everyone of God's creatures! I have never desired glory amongst men, and if their contempt used to attract my heart, I have realised that even this is too glorious for me, and I thirst to be forgotten.

The Glory of Jesus – this is my sole ambition. I abandon my glory to Him; and if He seem to forget me, well, He is free to do so since I am no longer on my own, but His. He will weary sooner of making me wait than I shall of waiting.

VIII

[One day when Soeur Thérèse was suffering from feverishness, one of the Sisters urged her to help in a difficult piece of painting. For a moment Thérèse's countenance betrayed an inward struggle,

[52] Soeur Thérèse here alludes to the probable opinion of theologians that – as in Baptism – all stain of sin is removed and all temporal punishment for sin remitted, by the vows taken on the day of religious profession. [ED.]

which did not escape the notice of Mother Agnes of Jesus. That same evening Thérèse wrote her the following letter.]

May 28, 1897.

MY DEAREST MOTHER, - I have just been shedding sweet tears – tears of repentance, but still more of thankfulness and love. To-day I showed you the treasure of my patience, and how virtuous I am – I who preach so well to others! I am glad that you have seen my want of perfection. You did not scold me, and yet I deserved it. But at all times your gentleness speaks to me more forcibly than would severe words. To me you are the image of God's Mercy.

Sister N., on the contrary, is more often the image of God's severity. Well, I have just met her, and, instead of passing me coldly by, she embraced me and said: "Poor little Sister, I am so sorry … I do not want to tire you; it was wrong of me to ask your help; leave the work alone." In my heart I felt perfect sorrow, and I was much surprised to escape all blame. I know she must really deem me imperfect. She spoke in this way because she thinks I am soon to die. However that may be, I have heard nothing but kind and tender words from her; and so I consider he most kind, and myself an unamiable creature.

When I returned to our cell, I was wondering what Jesus thought, when all at once I remembered His words to the woman taken in adultery: "*Hath no man condemned thee?*"[53] With tears in my eyes I answered Him: "No one, Lord, … neither my little Mother – the image of Thy Mercy – nor Sister N., the image of Thy Justice. I feel that I can go in peace, because neither wilt Thou condemn me."

I confess I am much happier because of my weakness than if – sustained by grace – I had been a model of patience. It does me so much good to see that Jesus is always sweet and tender towards me. Truly it is enough to make me die of grateful love.

My little Mother, you will understand how this evening the vessel of God's Mercy has overflowed for your child…. *Even now I know it! Yea, all my hopes will be fulfilled ...*

VERILY THE LORD WILL WORK WONDERS FOR ME, AND THEY WILL INIFINITELY SURPASS MY BOUNDLESS DESIRES.

[53] John viii. 10.

LETTERS TO SISTER MARY OF THE SACRED HEART

I

February 21, 1888

MY DEAR MARIE, - You cannot think what a lovely present Papa made me last week; I believe if I gave you a hundred or even a thousand guesses you would never find out what it was. Well, my dear Father bought me a new-born lamb, all white and fleecy. He said that before I entered the Carmel he wanted me to have this pleasure. We were all delighted, especially Céline. What touched me more than anything was Papa's thoughtfulness. Besides, a lamb is symbolic, and it made me think of Pauline.

So far, so good, but now for the sequel. We were already building castles in the air, and expected that in two or three days the lamb would be frisking round us. But the pretty creature died that same afternoon. Poor little thing, scarcely was it born when it suffered and died. It looked so gentle and innocent that Céline made a sketch of it, and then we laid it in a grave dug by Papa. It appeared to be asleep. I did not want the earth to be its covering, so we put snow upon our pet, and all was over.

You do no know, dearest Godmother, how this little creature's death has made me reflect. Clearly we must not become attached to anything, no matter how innocent, because it will slip from our grasp when least expected; nothing but the eternal can content us.

II

(Written during her retreat before receiving the habit.)

January 8, 1889

You're little *Lamb* – as you love to call me, dearest sister – would borrow from you some strength and courage. I cannot speak to Our Lord, and He is silent too. Pray that my retreat may be pleasing to the Heart of Him Who alone reads the secrets of the soul.

Life is full of sacrifice, it is true, but why seek happiness here? For our life is but "a night to be spent in a wretched inn," as our holy Mother St. Teresa says. I assure you my heart thirsts ardently for happiness, but I see clearly that no creature can quench that thirst. On the contrary, the oftener I would drink from these seductive waters the more burning will my thirst become. I know a source where "*they that drink shall yet thirst,*"[54] but with a delicious thirst, a thirst one can always allay…. That source is the suffering known to Jesus only.

VII

August 14, 1889.

[54] Eccles. xxiv.29

You ask for a word from your little Lamb. But what shall I say? Is it not you who have taught me? Remember those days when I sat upon your knee, and you talked to me of Heaven.

I can still hear you say: "Look at those who want to become rich, and see how they toil to obtain money. Now, my little Thérèse, through every moment of the day and with far less trouble, we can lay up riches in Heaven. Diamonds are so plentiful, we can gather them together as with a rake, and we do this by performing all our actions for the love of God." Then I would leave you, my heart overflowing with joy, and fully bent on amassing great wealth.

Time has flown since those happy hours spent together in our dear nest. Jesus has visited us, and has found us worthy to be tried in the crucible of suffering. God has said that on the last day "*He will wipe away all tears from our eyes,*"[55] and no doubt the more tears there are to dry, the greater will be the happiness.

Pray to-morrow for the little one who owes you her upbringing, and who, without you, might never have come to the Carmel.

IV

(During her retreat before profession.)

September 4, 1890.

The heavenly music falls but faintly on the ear of your child, and it has been a dreary journey towards her Bridal Day. It is true her Betrothed has led her through fertile lands and gorgeous scenery, but the dark night has prevented her admiring, much less revelling in, the beauty all around. Perhaps you think this grieved her. Oh, no! she is happy to follow her Betrothed for His own sake, and not for the sake of His gifts. He is so ravishingly beautiful, even when silent – even when concealed. Weary of earthly consolation, your little child wishes for her Beloved alone. I believe that the work of Jesus during this retreat has been to detach me from everything but Himself. My only comfort is the exceeding strength and peace that is mine. Besides, I hope to be just what He wills I should be, and in this lies all my happiness.

Did you but know how great is my joy at giving pleasure to Jesus through being utterly deprived of all joy! … Truly this is the very refinement of all joy – joy we do not feel.

V

September 7, 1890.

To-morrow I shall be the Spouse of Jesus, of Him Whose "*look was as it were hidden and despised*."[56] What a future this alliance opens up! How can I thank Him, how render myself less unworthy of so great a favour?

I thirst after Heaven, that blessed abode where our love for Jesus will be without bounds. True, we must pass through suffering and tears to reach that home, but I wish to suffer all that my Beloved is pleased to send me; I wish to let Him do as He wills with His "little ball." You tell me, dearest Godmother, that my Holy Child is beautifully adorned for my wedding-day;[57] perhaps, however, you wonder why I have not put new rose-coloured candles. The old ones

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[55] Apoc. xxi. 4.
[56] Isa. iiii. 3.
[57] She alludes to the Statue of the Holy Child in the cloister, which was under her own special care. [ED.]

appeal to me more because they were lighted for the first time on my clothing-day. They were then fresh and of rosy hue. Papa had given them to me; he was there, and all was joyful. But now their tint has faded. Are there yet any rose-coloured joys on earth for you little Thérèse? No, for her there are only heavenly joys; joys where the hollowness of all things gives place to the Uncreated Reality.

VI

MY DEAREST SISTER, - I do not find it difficult to answer you…. How can you ask me if it be possible for you to love God as I love Him! My desire for martyrdom is as nothing; it is not to that I owe the boundless confidence that fills my heart. Such desires might be described as spiritual riches, which are *the unjust mammon*, [58] when one is complacent in them as in something great…. These aspirations are a consolation Jesus sometimes grants to weak souls like mine – and there are many such! But when He withholds this consolation, it is a special grace. Remember these words of a holy monk: "The Martyrs suffered with joy, and the King of Martyrs in sorrow." Did not Jesus cry out: "*My Father, remove this chalice from Me.*"[59] Do not think, then, that my desires are a proof of my love. Indeed I know well that it is certainly not these desires which make God take pleasure in my soul. What does please Him is to find me love my littleness, my poverty: it is the blind trust which I have in His Mercy…. There is my sole treasure, dearest Godmother, and should it not be yours?

Are you not ready to suffer all that God wills? Assuredly; and so if you wish to know joy and to love suffering, you are really seeking your own consolation, because once we love, all suffering disappears. Verily, if we were to go together to martyrdom, you would gain great merit, and I should have none, unless it pleased Our Lord to change my dispositions.

Dear sister, do you not understand that to love Jesus and to be His Victim of Love, the more weak and wretched we are the better material do we make for this consuming and transfiguring Love? … The simple desire to be a Victim suffices, but we must also consent to ever remain poor and helpless, and here lies the difficulty: "Where shall we find one that is truly poor in spirit? We must seek him afar off," says the author of the *Imitation*.[60] He does not say that we must search among great souls, but "afar off" – that is to say, in abasement and in nothingness. Let us remain far from all that dazzles, loving our littleness, and content to have no joy. Then we shall be truly poor in spirit, and Jesus will come to seek us however far off we may be, and transform us into flames of Love…. I long to make you understand what I feel. Confidence alone must lead us to Love…. Does not fear lead to the thought of the strict justice that is threatened to sinners? But that is not the justice Jesus will show to such as love Him.

God would not vouchsafe you the desire to the Victim of His Merciful Love, were this not a favour in store – or rather already granted, since you are wholly surrendered unto Him and long to be consumed by Him, and God never inspires a longing which He cannot fulfil.

The road lies clear, and along it we must run together. I feel that Jesus wishes to bestow on us the same graces; He wishes to grant us both a free entrance into His Heavenly Kingdom. Dearest Godmother, you would like to hear still more of the secrets which Jesus confides to your child, but human speech cannot tell what the human heart itself can scarcely conceive. Besides, Jesus confides His secrets to you likewise. This I know, for you it was who taught me to listen to His Divine teaching. On the day of my Baptism you promised in my name that I would serve

[58] Luke xvi. 2.
[59] Luke xxii. 42.
[60] Cf. Imit., xi. 4.

Him alone. You were the Angel who led me and guided me in my days of exile and offered me to Our Lord. As a child loves its mother, I love you; in Heaven only will you realise the gratitude with which my heart is full to overflowing.

Your little daughter,

TERESA OF THE CHILD JESUS.

LETTERS TO SISTER FRANCES TERESA[61]

I

August 13, 1893.

DEAR LITTLE SISTER, - At last your desires are satisfied. Like the dove sent forth from the ark, you have been unable to find a spot on earth whereon to rest, and have long been on the wing seeking to re-enter the blessed abode where your heart had for ever fixed its home. Jesus has kept you waiting, but at last, touched by the plaintive cry of His dove, He has put forth His Divine Hand, and, taking hold of it, has set it in His Heart – that sanctuary of His Love.

It is quite a spiritual joy, this joy of mine. For I shall never look upon you again, never hear your voice as I outpour my heart into yours. Yet I know that earth is but a halting-place to us who journey towards a Heavenly Home. What matter if the routes we follow lie apart? Our goal is the same – that Heaven where we shall meet, no more to be separated. There we shall taste for ever the sweets of our earthly home. We shall have much to tell one another when this exile is ended. Speech here below is so inadequate, but a single glance will be enough for perfect understanding in our home beyond; and I believe that our happiness will be greater than if we had never been parted here.

Meanwhile we must live by sacrifice. Without it there would be no merit in the religious life. As someone told us in a conference: "The reason why the forest oak raises its head so high is because, hemmed in on all sides, it wastes no say in putting forth branches underneath, but towers aloft. Thus in religious life the soul, hedged in all around by the rule and by the practice of community life, of necessity finds there a means of lifting a high head towards Heaven."

Dearest sister, pray for your little Thérèse that she may draw profit from her exile on earth and from the plentiful means granted her of meriting Heaven.

II

January, 1895.

DEAR LITTLE SISTER, - How fruitful for Heaven has been the year that is gone! … Our dear Father has seen that which the eye of man cannot see, he has heard the minstrelsy of the angels … now his heart understands, and his soul enjoys "*the things which God hath prepared for those who love Him*."[62] … Our turn will come, and it is full sweet to think our sails are set towards the Eternal Shore.

Do you not find, as I do, that our beloved Father's death has drawn us nearer to Heaven? More than half of our loved ones already enjoy the Vision of God, and the five who remain in exile will follow soon. This thought of the shortness of life gives me courage, and helps me to put up with the weariness of the journey. What matters a little toil upon earth? We pass …"*We have not here a lasting city*."[63]

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[61] Nearly all the letters written by Soeur Thérèse to her sister Léonie are lost. These few have been recovered. It will be remembered that Léonie entered the Convent of the Visitation at Caen. See note, page 113.

[62] Cf. 1 Cor. ii. 9.

[63] Hev. xiii. 14.

Think of your Thérèse during this month consecrated to the Infant Jesus, and beg of Him that she may always remain a very little child. I will offer the same prayer for you, because I know your desires, and that humility is your favourite virtue.

Which Thérèse will be the more fervent? … She who will be the more humble, the more closely united to Jesus, and the more faithful in making love the mainspring of every action. We must not let slip one single occasion of sacrifice, everything has such value in the religious life … Pick up a pin from a motive of love, and you may thereby convert a soul. Jesus alone can make our deeds of such worth, so let us love Him with every fibre of our heart.

III

July 12, 1896.

MY DEAR LITTLE LÊONIE, - I should have answered your letter last Sunday if it had been given to me, but you know that, being the youngest, I run the risk of not seeing letters for some considerable time after my sisters, and occasionally not at all. I only read yours on Friday, so forgive my delay.

You are right – Jesus is content with a tender look or a sigh of love. For my part, I find it quite easy to practise perfection, now that I realise it only means making Jesus captive through His Heart. Look at a little child who has just vexed its mother, either by giving way to temper or by disobedience. If it hides in a corner and is sulky, or if it cries for fear of being punished, its mother will certainly not forgive the fault. But should it run to her with its little arms outstretched, and say; "Kiss me, Mother; I will not do it again!" what mother would not straightway clasp her child lovingly to her heart, and forget all it had done? … She knows quite well that her little one will repeat the fault – no matter, her darling will escape all punishment so long as it makes appeal to her heart.

Even when the law of fear was in force, before Our Lord's coming, the prophet Isaias said – speaking in the name of the King of Heaven: "*Can a woman forget her babe? ... And if she should forget, yet will I not forget thee*."[64] What a touching promise! We who live under the law of Love, shall we not profit by the loving advances made by our Spouse? How can anybody fear Him Who allows Himself to be made captive "*with one hair of our neck*"?[65]

Let us learn to keep Him prisoner – this God, the Divine Beggar of love. By telling us that a single hair can work this wonder, He shows us that the smallest actions done for His Love are those which charm His Heart. If it were necessary to do great things, we should be deserving of pity, but we are happy beyond measure, because Jesus lets Himself be led captive by the smallest action…. With you, dear Léonie, little sacrifices are never lacking. Is not your life made up of them? I rejoice to see you in presence of such wealth, especially when I remember that you know how to make profit thereby, not only for yourself but likewise for poor sinners. It is so sweet to help Jesus to save the souls which He has ransomed at the price of His Precious Blood, and which only await our help to keep them from the abyss.

It seems to me that if our sacrifices take Jesus captive, our joys make Him prisoner too. All that is needful to attain this end is, that instead of giving ourselves over to selfish happiness, we offer to our Spouse the little joys He scatters in our path, to charm our hearts and draw them towards Him.

You ask for news of my health. Well, my cough has quite disappeared. Does that please you? It will not prevent Our Lord from taking me to Himself whensoever He wishes. And I

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[64] Isa. xiix. 15.
[65] Cant. iv. 9.

need not prepare for that journey, since my whole endeavour is to remain as a little child. Jesus Himself must pay all its expenses, as well as the price of my admission to Heaven.

Good-bye, dearest one, pray to Him without fail for the last and least of your sisters.

IV

July 17, 1897.

MY DEAR LÊONIE, - I am so pleased to be able to write to you again. Some days ago I thought I should never again have this consolation, but it seems that God wishes to prolong somewhat the time of my exile. This does not trouble me – I would not enter Heaven one moment sooner through my own will. The only real happiness on earth is to strive always to think "*how goodly is the chalice*"[66] that Jesus gives us. Yours is indeed a goodly one, dear Léonie. If you wish to be a Saint – and it will not be hard – keep only one end in view: give pleasure to Jesus, and bind yourself more closely to Him.

Good-bye, my dear sister, I should wish the thought of my entering Heaven to fill you with joy, because I shall then be better able to give you proof of my tender love. In the Heart of our Heavenly Spouse we shall live His life, and through eternity I shall remain,

Your very little sister,

TERESA OF THE CHILD JESUS.

[66] Ps. xxii. 5.

LETTERS TO HER COUSIN MARIE GUÉRIN

I

1888.

Before you confided in me,[67] I felt you were suffering, and my heart was one with yours. Since you have the humility to ask advice of your little Thérèse, this is what she thinks: you have grieved me greatly by abstaining from Holy Communion, because you have grieved Our Lord. The devil must be very cunning to deceive a soul in this way. Do you not know, dear Marie, that by acting thus you help him to accomplish his end? The treacherous creature knows quite well that when a soul is striving to belong wholly to God he cannot cause her to sin, so he merely tries to persuade her that she has sinned. This is a considerable gain, but not enough to satisfy his hatred, so he aims at something more, and tries to shut out Jesus from a tabernacle which Jesus covets. Unable to enter this sanctuary himself, he wishes that at least it remain empty and without its God. Alas, what will become of that poor little heart? When the devil has succeeded in keeping a soul from Holy Communion he has gained all his ends … while Jesus weeps! …

Remember, little Marie, that this sweet Jesus is there in the Tabernacle expressly for you and you alone. Remember that He burns with the desire to enter your heart. Do not listen to satan. Laugh him to scorn, and go without fear to receive Jesus, the God of peace and of love.

"Thérèse thinks all this" – you say – "because she does not know my difficulties." She does know, and knows them well; she understands everything, and she tells you confidently that you can go without fear to receive you only true Friend. She, too, has passed through the martyrdom of scruples, but Jesus gave her the grace to receive the Blessed Sacrament always, even when she imagined she had committed great sins. I assure you I have found that this is the only means of ridding oneself of the devil. When he sees that he is losing his time he leaves us in peace.

In truth it is impossible that a heart which can only find rest in contemplation of the Tabernacle – and yours is such, you tell me – could so far offend Our Lord as not to be able to receive Him … What does offend Jesus, what wounds Him to the Heart, is want of confidence.

Pray much that the best portion of your life may not be overshadowed by idle fears. We have only life's brief moments to spend for the Glory of God, and well does satan know it. This is why he employs every ruse to make us consume them in useless labour. Dear sister, go often to Holy Communion, go very often – that is your one remedy.

I

[67] The allusion is to the scruples from which Marie suffered. Having read this letter – which is a strong plea for Frequent Communion – Pope Pius X declared it "*most opportune*." Thérèse was but fifteen when she wrote it. [ED.]

1894.

You are like some little village maiden who, when sought in marriage by a mighty king would not dare to accept him, on the plea that she is not rich enough, and is strange to the ways of a court. But does not her royal lover know better than she does, the extent of her poverty and ignorance?

Marie, though you are nothing, do not forget that Jesus is All. You have only to lose your own nothingness in that Infinite All, and henceforth to think only of that All who alone is worthy of your love.

You tell me you wish to see the fruit of your efforts. That is exactly what Jesus would hide from you. He likes to contemplate by Himself these little fruits of our virtue. They console Him.

You are quite wrong, Marie, if you think that Thérèse walks eagerly along the way of Sacrifice: her weakness is still very great, and every day some new and wholesome experience brings this home more clearly. Yet Jesus delights to teach her how to *glory in her infirmities*.[68] It is a great grace, and I pray Him to give it to you, for with it come peace and tranquility of heart. When we see our misery we do not like to look at ourselves but only upon our Beloved.

You ask me for a method of attaining perfection. I know of Love – and Love only! Our hearts are made for this alone. Sometimes I endeavour to find some other word for love; but in a land of exile "words which have a beginning and an end"[69] are quite unable to render adequately the emotions of the soul, and so we must keep to the one simple word – LOVE.

But on whom shall our poor hearts lavish this love, and who will be worthy of this treasure? Is there anyone who will understand it and – above all – is there anyone who will be able to repay? Marie, Jesus alone understands love: He alone can give back all – yea, infinitely more than the utmost we can give.

LETTER TO HER COUSIN,

JEANNE GUÉRIN

(MADAME LA NÊRLE)

August,1895.

It is a very great sacrifice that God has asked of you, my dear Jeanne, in calling your little Marie to the Carmel; but remember that He has promised a hundredfold to anyone who for His Love hath left father or mother or *sister*.[70] Now, for love of Jesus, you have not hesitated to part with a sister dearer to you than words can say, and therefore He is bound to keep His promise. I know that these words are generally applied to those who enter the religious life, but my heart tells me they were spoken, too, for those whose generosity is such that they will sacrifice to God even the loved ones they hold dearer than life itself.

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[68] 2 Cor. xi. 5.
[69] St Augustine
[70] Mark x. 30.

LETTERS TO HER BROTHER MISSIONARIES[71]

I

1895.

Our Divine Lord asks no sacrifice beyond our strength. At times, it is true, He makes us taste to the full the bitterness of the chalice He puts to our lips. And when He demands the sacrifice of all that is dearest on earth, it is impossible without a very special grace not to cry out as He did during His Agony in the Garden: "*My Father, let this chalice pass from Me!*" But we must hasten to add: "*Yet not as I will, but as Thou wilt.*"[72] It is so consoling to think that Jesus, "*the Strong God*,"[73] has felt all our weaknesses and shuddered at the sight of the bitter chalice – that very chalice He had so ardently desired.

Your lot is indeed a beautiful one, since Our Lord has chosen it for you, and has first touched with His own Lips the cup which He holds out to yours. A Saint has said: "The greatest honour God can bestow upon a soul is not to give to it great things, but to ask of it great things." Jesus treats you as a privileged child. It is His wish you should begin your mission even now,[74] and save souls through the Cross. Was it not by suffering and death that He ransomed the world? I know that you aspire to the happiness of laying down your life for Him; but the martyrdom of the heart is not less fruitful than the shedding of blood, and this martyrdom is already yours. Have I not, then, good reason to say that your lot is a most beautiful one – worthy an apostle of Christ?

II

1896.

Let us work together for the salvation of souls! We have but the one day of this life to save them, and so give to Our Lord a proof of our love. To-morrow will be Eternity, then Jesus will reward you a hundredfold for the sweet joys you have given up for Him. He knows the extent of your sacrifice. He knows that the sufferings of those you hold dear increase your own; but He has suffered this same martyrdom for our salvation. He, too, left His Mother, He beheld that sinless Virgin standing at the foot of the Cross, her heart pierced through with a sword of sorrow, and I hope He will console your own dear mother…. I beg Him most earnestly to do so.

Ah! if the Divine Master would permit those you are about to leave for His Love but one glimpse of the glory in store, and the vast retinue of souls that will escort you to Heaven, already they would be repaid for the great sacrifice that is at hand.

III

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[71] See page 171.
[72] Matt. xxvi. 39.
[73] Isa. ix. 6.
[74] This letter and the following are addressed to a Seminarist. [ED.]

February 24, 1896.

Please say this little prayer for me each day; it sums up all my desires:

"Merciful Father, in the name of Thy sweet Jesus, of the Blessed Virgin, and all the Saints, I beg Thee to consume my sister with Thy spirit of love, and to grant her the grace to make Thee greatly loved."

If Our Lord takes me soon to Himself, I ask that you still to continue this prayer, because my longing will be the same in Heaven as upon earth: *to love Jesus and to make Him loved*.

IV

. . . . . .

All I desire is God's Holy Will, and if in Heaven I could no longer work for His glory, I should prefer exile to Home.

V

June 21, 1897.

You may well sing of the Mercies of God! They shine forth in you with splendour. You love St. Augustine and St. Mary Magdalen, those souls to whom many sins were forgiven because they loved much. I love them too; I love their sorrow, and especially their audacious love. When I see Mary Magdalen come forth before all Simon's guests to wash with her tears her Master's Feet – those Feet that for the first time she touches – I feel her heart has fathomed that abyss of love and mercy, the Heart of Jesus; and I feel, too, that not only was He willing to forgive, but even liberally to dispense the favours of a Divine and intimate friendship, and to raise her to the loftiest heights of prayer.

My Brother, since I also have been given to understand the Love of the Heart of Jesus, I confess that all fear has been driven from mine. The remembrance of my faults humbles me; and it helps me never to rely upon my own strength – which is but weakness – but more than all, it speaks to me of mercy and of love. When a soul with childlike trust casts her faults into Love's all-devouring furnace, how shall they escape being utterly consumed?

I know that many Saints have passed their lives in the practice of amazing penance for the sake of expiating their sins. But what of that? "*In My Father's house there are many mansions*."[75] These are the words of Jesus, and therefore I follow the path He marks out for me; I try to be nowise concerned about myself and what Jesus deigns to accomplish in my soul.

VI

1897.

On this earth where everything changes, one thing alone does never change – our Heavenly King's treatment of His friends. From the day He raised the standard of the Cross, in its shadow all must fight and win. "The life of every missionary abounds in crosses," said

[75] John xiv. 2.

Théophane Vénard.[76] And again: "True happiness consists in suffering, and in order to live we must die."

Rejoice, my Brother, that the first efforts of your Apostalate are stamped with the seal of the Cross. Far more by suffering and by persecution than by eloquent discourses does Jesus wish to build up His Kingdom.

You are still – you tell me – a little child who cannot speak. Neither could Father Mazel, who was ordained with you, and yet he has already won the palm … Far beyond our thoughts are the thoughts of God! When I learnt that this young missionary had died before he had set foot on the field of his labours, I felt myself drawn to invoke him. I seemed to see him amidst the glorious Martyr choir. No doubt, in the eyes of men he does not merit the title of Martyr, but in the eyes of God this inglorious death is no less precious than the sacrifice of him who lays down his life for the Faith.

Though one must be exceeding pure before appearing in the sight of the All-Holy God, still I know that He is infinitely just, and this very Justice which terrifies so many souls is the source of all my confidence and joy. Justice is not only stern severity toward the guilty; it takes account of the good intention, and gives to virtue its reward. Indeed I hope as much from the Justice of God as from His Mercy. It is because He is just, that "*He is compassionate and merciful, long-suffering, and plenteous in mercy. For He knoweth our frame, He remembereth that we are dust. As a father hath compassion on his children, so hath the Lord compassion on us*."[77]

O my Brother, after these beautiful and consoling words of the Royal Prophet, how can we doubt God's power to open the gates of His Kingdom to His children who have loved Him unto perfect sacrifice, who have not only left home and country so as to make Him known and loved, but even long to lay down their lives for Him? … Jesus said truly there is no greater love than this. Nor will He be outdone in generosity. How could He cleanse in the flames of Purgatory souls consumed with the fire of Divine Love?

I have used many words to express my thought, and yet I fear I have failed. What I wish to convey is, that in my opinion all missionaries are Martyrs by will and desire, and not even one should pass through the purifying flames.

This, then, is what I think about the Justice of God; my own way is all confidence and love, and I cannot understand those souls who are afraid of so affectionate a Friend. Sometimes, when I read books in which perfection is put before us with the goal obstructed by a thousand obstacles, my poor little head is quickly fatigued. I close the learned treatise, which tires my brain and dries up my heart, and I turn to the Sacred Scriptures. Then all becomes clear and lightsome – a single word opens out infinite vistas, perfection appears easy, and I see that it is enough to acknowledge our nothingness, and like children surrender ourselves into the Arms of the Good God. Leaving to great and lofty minds the beautiful books which I cannot understand, still less put in practice, I rejoice in my littleness because "*only little children and those who are like them shall be admitted to the Heavenly Banquet*."[78] Fortunately – "*there are many mansions in my Father's House*":[79] if there were only those – to me – incomprehensible mansions with their baffling roads, I should certainly never enter there …

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[76] See note, p. 201.
[77] Ps. cii. 8, 14, 13.
[78] Cf. Matt. xix. 14.
[79] John xiv. 2.

VII

July 13,1897.

Your soul is too great to cling to the consolations of earth, and even now its abode should be in Heaven, for it is written: "*Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also*."[80] Is not Jesus your only treasure? Now that He is in Heaven, it is there your heart should dwell. This sweet Saviour has long since forgotten your infidelities. He sees only your longing after perfection, and the sight makes glad His Heart.

Stay no longer at His Feet, I beseech you, but follow this first impulse to throw yourself into His Arms. Your place is there, and I see clearly – more clearly than in your former letters – that all other heavenly route is barred to you save the way your little sister treads.

I hold with you when you say that the Heart of Jesus is more grieved by the thousand little imperfections of His friends than by the faults, even grave, which His enemies commit. Yet it seems to me, dear Brother, it is only when those who are His own are habitually guilty of want of thought, and neglect to seek His pardon, that He can say: "*These Wounds which you see in the midst of My Hands, I have received in the house of those who love Me*."[81] But His Heart thrills with joy when He has to deal with all those who truly love, and who after each little fault come to fling themselves into His Arms imploring forgiveness. He says to His Angels what the prodigal's father said to his servants: "*Put a ring upon his finger, and let us rejoice*."[82] O Brother! Verily the Divine Heart's Goodness and Merciful Love are little known! It is true that to enjoy these treasures we must humble ourselves, must confess our nothingness … and here is where many a soul draws back.

VIII

1897.

What attracts me towards our Heavenly Home is the Master's call – the hope of loving Him at last to the fulfilling of all my desire – the thought that I shall be able to win Him the love of a multitude of souls, who will bless Him through all eternity.

I have never asked God that I might die young – that to me were a cowardly prayer; but from my childhood He has deigned to inspire me with a strong conviction that my life would be a short one.

I feel we must tread the same road to Heaven – the road of suffering and love. When I myself have reached the port, I will teach you how best to sail the world's tempestuous sea – with the self-abandonment of a child well aware of a father's love, and of his vigilance in the hour of danger.

I long so much to make you understand the expectant love of the Heart of Jesus. Your last letter has made my own heart thrill sweetly. I learnt how closely your soul is sister to mine, since God calls that soul to mount to Himself by the *lift of love*, without climbing the steep stairway of fear. I am not surprised you find it hard to be familiar with Jesus – one cannot become so in a day; but this I do know, I shall aid you much more to tread this beautiful path when I lay aside the burden of this perishable body. Ere long you will exclaim with St. Augustine: "Love is my lodestone!"

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[80] Luke xii. 34.
[81] Cf. Zach. xiii. 6.
[82] Cf. Luke xv. 22.

X

July 26, 1897.

When you read these few lines I shall perhaps be no more. I know not the future; yet I can confidently say that my Spouse is at the door. I would need a miracle to keep me in exile, and I do not think that Jesus will work that miracle – He does nothing that is of no avail.

Brother, I am so happy to die! Yes, happy … not because I shall be free from suffering: on the contrary, suffering combined with love seems the one thing worthy of desire in this vale of tears; but happy to die because far more than on earth I shall help the souls I hold dear.

Jesus has always treated me as a spoilt child…. It is true that His Cross has been with me from the cradle, but for that Cross He has given me a passionate love …

XI

August 14, 1897.

I am about to go before God, and I understand now more than ever that one thing is needful – to work for Him alone, and do nothing for self or for creatures. Jesus wishes to own your heart completely. Before this can be, you will have much to suffer … but oh! what joy when comes the happy hour of going Home! I shall not die – I do but enter into Life … and whatsoever I cannot tell you here upon earth I will make you understand from the heights of Heaven….